

# *Service*

A Book of Quotes, Pictures, and Reflections

*Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace  
National Historic Site*

**My name is**

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The millionaire Cornelius Van Schaack Roosevelt lived in a mansion overlooking Union Square. The property extended down the entire block along Broadway from 13th to 14th Street.

Cornelius had inherited control of the family firm, Roosevelt & Son, from his father. And he set about securing its fortune, shifting the business from hardware to imported plate glass, and moving into real estate investment and private banking.

But the Roosevelts preferred to keep their money private, that is, out of the press. So when a list of New York's ten richest men was published in the *Gallaxy*, with Cornelius ranking among those named, the eldest son denounced this intrusion in a letter in the *New York Times*.



Margaret Barnhill, Thee’s mother and President Theodore Roosevelt’s paternal grandmother.

Cornelius descended from a long unbroken line of Dutch stock, an old family that had resided in New York (from when it was New Amsterdam and then renamed) for two centuries.

As son, he broke family custom by marrying a woman of non-Dutch blood, who was also not a member of New York society. Margaret Barnhill was the first outsider entry into the family, of English and Irish background, and a Philadelphia Quaker. The two had six children.

Margaret would instill in her children the spirit of *noblesse oblige*, the noble obligation to help those of less fortune, the philosophy that private wealth presented this class an opportunity to do good.

One of these children was Theodore, or “Thee.” He would become the father of the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt.

But this is a story about Thee...

When the young man was nineteen, he was allowed to travel alone on a Grand Tour of Europe, writing back home.

His older brother Robert, unimpressed by his younger brother's letters, admonished him on describing to him any more scenery or buildings or monuments. He lectured: the object of travelling "is to see men. To enlarge your mind... by conversing with, and seeing the bent of the minds of other people."

Another angry letter from his older brother read: "Have you seen a Dutchman, a Frenchman, an Irishman; besides the porters who carried your trunks? If so, what did you say to them and what did they say to you?"

Finally, Thee took his brother's advice to heart. He wrote home: "I scarce know terms strong enough to express my feelings... Everything is in the extremes."



Thee, President Theodore Roosevelt's father.



As an adult, Thee devoted much of his life to being of service to society. Always connected with new work, he assisted a number of institutions in their infancy, co-founding and funding various museums, hospitals, and other charities:

American Museum of Natural History

Metropolitan Museum of Art

New York Orthopedic Hospital

Children's Aid Society

(Newsboy's Lodging House)

(Orphan Trains)

In order to pass onto his own children the spirit of reaching out, Thee would take his four children, Anna, Theodore, Elliott, and Corinne, affectionately called Bamie, Teedie, Ellie, and Conie, on his visits to various charities.



Their weekend itinerary would be packed. According to Anna:

“Generally... Saturdays commenced by a ride on horseback in the Park, followed instantly... by a visit of inspection to both the Art Museum and the Museum of Natural History, and then to some one of the Children’s Aid Society schools... We could get home for lunch very late... By the time that was over, we either drove in the park or visited a hospital.”

The next day, the children would accompany their father on his regular weekly visit to the Newsboys’ Lodging House. According to Corinne:

“Every Sunday evening of his life he went to that lodging-house, after our early hospitable Sunday supper... and there he would talk to the boys...”



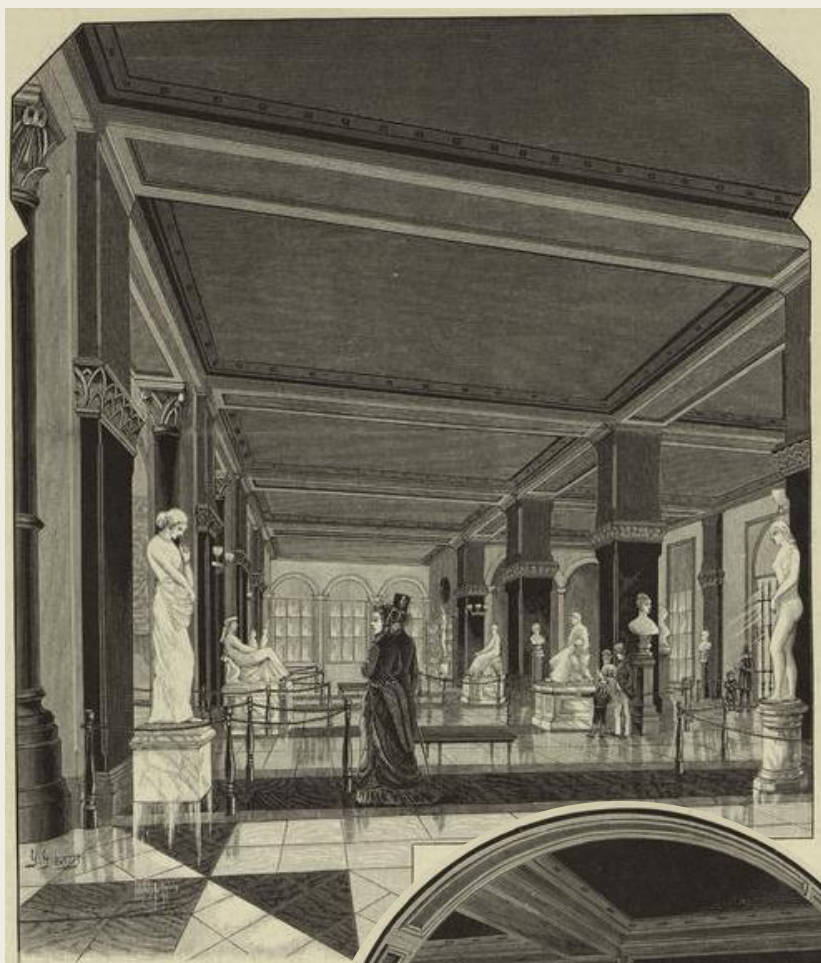
American Museum of Natural History

## **American Museum of Natural History (AMNH)**

The idea to found a natural history museum in New York was conceived by a young man named Albert Smith Bickmore while he was a student under the famous scientist Louis Agassiz at Harvard. Bickmore remembered how a little later: “[W]hen I journeyed for three years in Eastern Asia and over Siberia... I carried with me everywhere two things, a Bible and a sketch plan for a museum in New York.”

Not long afterward, he approached a number of local wealthy persons to persuade them to back the venture.

The charter was drawn up and signed in Thee’s parlor at 28 East 20th Street.



Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



## **The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET)**

The proposition for an art museum was made by John Jay of New York, a man then into his middle age, before a company of countrymen at a Fourth of July dinner, who had gathered to celebrate the occasion.

Jay later recalled how it was this simple suggestion, that it was time to lay the foundation, inspired a group of gentlemen who were present to organize together to carry out the task.

There was among the members behind the undertaking when the charter was created.



Remember any museums, zoos, aquariums, botanic gardens, or national parks you've visited.

## What things struck you as noteworthy?

[illegible]

## **New York Orthopedic Hospital**

Thee's eldest child, Bamie, had trouble with her spine. At age three, she was required to wear a "terrible" heavy brace that confined her movement. If she wanted to go somewhere or rest, she had to be picked up, and could only lie face down.

Soon, her father found a young doctor named Charles Fayette Taylor, who had radical theories, and who some thought was a quack. Taylor gave Bamie a lighter spinal assistant that was designed so she could move around and do exercises—physical therapy.

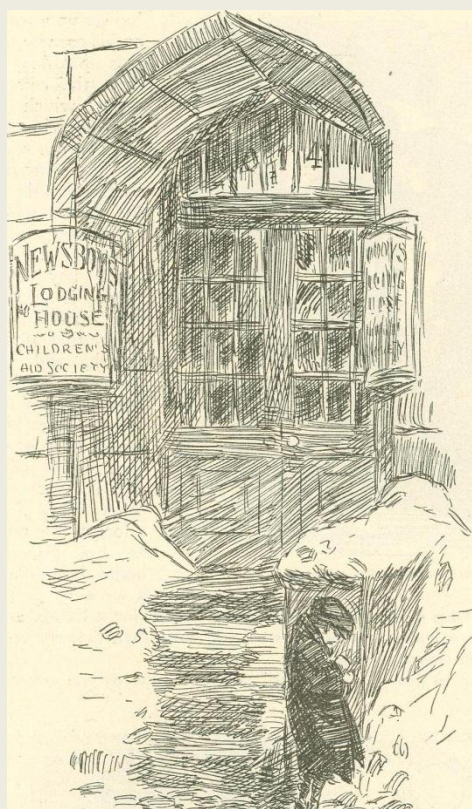
The success of this pioneering method led Thee to establish a hospital that would provide free medical treatment to children with spinal problems whose families could not afford it, placing Taylor as its director.

Thee fundraised for donations from sponsors representing New York's most affluent families, in order to finance the project. Corinne remembered:

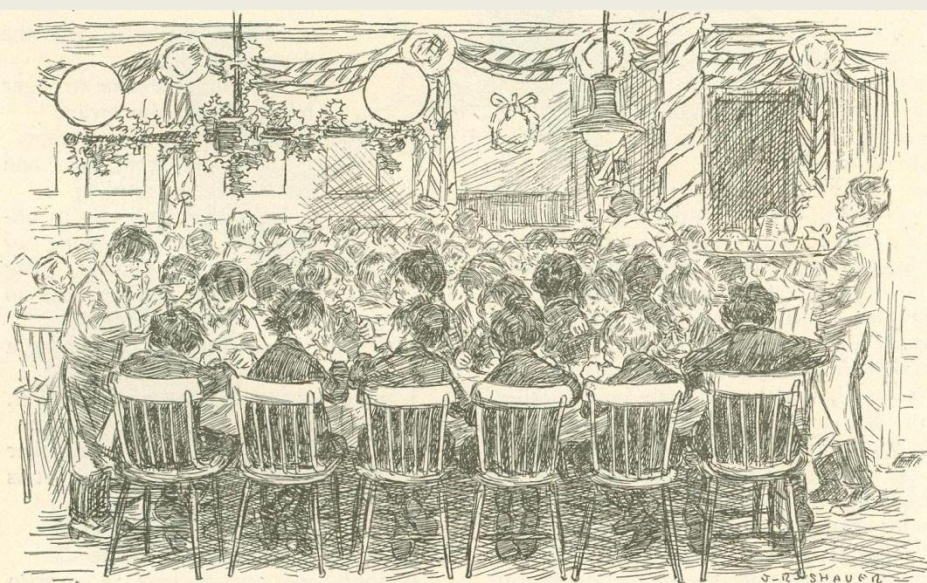
“... one beautiful spring afternoon, my mother gave what was supposed to be a purely social reception at our second home, at 6 West 57th Street, and my father saw to it that the little sufferers in whom he was interested were brought from their poverty-stricken homes to ours and laid upon our dining-room table, with the steel appliances which could help them back to normal limbs on their backs and legs, thus ready to visualize to New York citizens how these stricken little people might be cured... I can still hear the voice of the first Mrs. John Jacob Astor, as she leaned over one fragile-looking child, turning to my father, said: ‘Theodore, you are right; these children must be restored and made into active citizens again, and I for one will help you in your work.’ That very day enough money was donated to start the first Orthopedic Hospital...”

Recall any hospitals or clinics you've seen.  
What were your impressions?

## What were your impressions?



Newsboys' Lodging House



## **Children's Aid Society (CAS)**

Charles Loring Brace was 27, a young minister, when he founded the Children's Aid Society.

Thee is remembered by his eldest son Theodore as “a staunch friend of” Brace. In addition to giving his time, Thee generously contributed large sums of money to the cause, to aid the city's homeless boys.

The organization led two ambitious initiatives: the Newsboys' Lodging House and the Orphan Trains.

## **Newsboys' Lodging House**

Nightly, needy boys could get a clean bed to sleep in, and access to a shower thrown in, for a small charge of 6 cents per night (less than \$2 today).

For another 6 cents, they could get supper, which included milk, tea, or coffee, with an unlimited allowance of good bread, butter or molasses, and meat. The daily menu changed between corned beef, roast beef, stewed beef, and pork and beans, with soup every now and then, and as many helpings he wanted.

For breakfast, also 6 cents, they could have bread and coffee to send them off in the morning.

On holidays, hundreds of boys ate in shifts at its large annual feasts. A happy Thanksgiving and merry Christmas supper included turkey, boiled ham, loaves of bread, mashed potatoes, and plenty of pie, provided free, paid for by the generosity of benefactors.

## Orphan Trains

Brace believed in picking up the poor children from the streets of the city to escape to the countryside.

While many orphans were sent west, of the majority to homes out in the Midwest, a substantial number of children were also put with families in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, and a significant third went to live on farms in rural upstate New York.

Years later after Thee's death, when his son Theodore was Governor of New York, the Governor of Alaska Territory Joseph Brady came to greet him and shake him warmly by the hand. He said, because he was the son of the first Theodore. The former newsboy told him:

“I can never repay what he did for me, for it was through that early care and by giving me such a foster mother and father that I gradually rose in the world, until today I can greet his son as a fellow governor.”



Recollect any orphanages, shelters, long-term care facilities, or affordable housing you've been to.

[illegible]

Thee would see the city of New York  
“not so much for what it was as for  
what it might become,” for the example  
it could set.

“...my father, like his son, had the  
vision of things to be.”

– Corinne Roosevelt

*My father, Theodore Roosevelt,  
was the best man I ever knew.  
- Theodore Roosevelt*

[Service]

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